Clay Geerdes **COMIX WAVE 162**
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## WONDER CON 1995

On the cover of the program book for WONDER CON 9, Sergio Aragones' Groo is driving the comic dealers out of the dealer's room like Jesus drove the money changers out of the temple. In the actual dealer's room at the Convention Center in Oakland on April 22, 1995, more card dealing was going on than anything else. Behind the scenes, a lot of games of MAGIC were in progress, MAGIC being the latest fad, a game, I was told, a la Dungeons and Dragons, played with sets of cards. The comic book business appears to be suffering financially and one dealer suggested the number of countrywide stores might go from over 5,000 to less than 1,000 by 1996. Everything is blamed. Too many books. Too many companies. Too much of the same superhero rot aimed at the same audience. Prices on Golden and Silver Age comics continue to be inflated artificially. I think a lot of dealers simply double or triple the prices they had on the comics from the previous year. I looked at a lot of mildewed and quasi-rotten third and fourth-rate funny animal comics from the forties with price tags over $50 and felt contempt for the people perpetrating this fraud. Old issues of **NEW FUNNIES** in the 60s and 70s sequences going for those prices? Bullshit. What this kind of greed has done is wipe out the average collector who might buy these old comics. I'm not surprised that a shitty comic like **ACTION 1** sold for over a hundred grand earlier this year. Hey, there are people who pay millions for Andy Warhol's "paintings" so a high price tag has nothing to do with aesthetics. I've seen some ugly art hanging around this past couple of years and I mean bloated, angular, hostile, arrogant, snide, disgusting, meaningless, unsympathetic characters; parodies of parodies, clichés to the max, a humorless crop of Superman and Batman clones. No wonder bankruptcy is around the corner.

A friend told me she went to a Marvel panel and watched "five scared editors" hype the product. Stan Lee no longer runs the Marvel Universe and today's young editors are here today and gone tomorrow, the only criteria is money. Marvel owns Fleer now so there was a glitzy display of cards. Buy me! Buy me! There was Vampirella there to hype the new line of *Vampirella* comics. She looked uncomfortable with all those eyes on her exposed body. The little red costume was a couple sizes too small and her silicone implants were jammed up against each other. It was her duty to stand around in the dealers' room for hours, posing with the right people, keeping the right smile pasted on her face. The perfect symbol of the reactionary nature of the comic book industry. One young dealer told me frankly that he considered the comics "misogynistic anti-intellectual trash." Hey, nothing wrong with some tits and ass or tight-bulging muscles, but there has to be something more than repetitive sex and violence and tv street rap. There isn't a lot of honesty in either the books or the business these days. The younger kids are lied to and hustler routinely with a lot of mass-produced "collectors' items" that hit the quarter bins in short order. Teach the kids to be greedy little pigs. Forget the art and story. Look what happens: a kid buys a comic he is told has a certain value, then he goes to another dealer and tries to sell it only to hear that dealer tell him: "Get outa here. I got four cases of that shit." Nothing like this two-faced dealer attitude to make cynics out of the kids.

But did I hear any gossip? Well, Ron Turner showed me the cover for a collection he is doing of Justin Green's BINKY BROWN stuff. Said he saw the CRUMB movie Terry Zwigoff made and enjoyed it. It opened April 20 at the Kabuki in San Francisco. Crumb is still in France and will probably hide until the film has passed. On the other hand, be nice to see Crumb on all the talk shows, huh, up there on stage confronting a Donahue or Oprah audience? Or a Crumb THIS IS YOUR LIFE. Robert confronted by all the family and friends he has lampooned in his comic stories the past twenty years. "And, Bob, remember the high school bully you always criticized in your autobiographical stories? Well, he's here tonight. We flew him in just for this occasion!" Turner said Kitchen printed some of the movie posters, but there were none at Wonder Con. S. Clay Wilson was signing something somewhere in the room, but I never found him. Guy Colwell has painted a lot of nice miniatures and has been commissioned to do a mural for the Med on Telegraph in Berkeley.

Carlos Saldaña signed his **BURRITO: JACK OF ALL TRADES** for me. I read the first two issues. Nice style. Light-hearted at times, serious at others, a reflection no doubt of the artist's life in East Los Angeles. His address is POB 30476, Los Angeles 90030. $7 for the first two issues. #3 due in July. Another Latino comic company has formed in Dallas. Richard Dominquez published **EL GATO NEGRO 1** this past October. $3.25 pp from him POB 35833, Dallas, TX 75235.

Crabman did the cover and a story for **BUZZARD 13**. $4 pp from Cat-Head Comics, POB 576, Hudson, MA 01749. Steve Beaupre edits and **BUZZARD** comes out about three times a year. Others in this issue include Steve Lafler, Lloyd Dangle, and J. R. Williams.

Good news is that Chuck Jones is back. He has made a sequel to **ONE FROGGY EVENING** that will be released with **BATMAN FOREVER**. Jones comeback started with his Road Runner cartoon, **CHARIOTS OF FUR**, released with **RICHIE RICH**. Jones was a director at Warner Brothers from the thirties to the sixties. William Friar wrote a nice article about his career in the Oakland **TRIBUNE** for April 12, 1995, p. B-1. In that same issue, Frank Rizzo has a nice piece on Leonardo DiCaprio, coming into his own as a movie star since the success of **THIS BOY'S LIFE** and **WHAT'S EATING GILBERT GRAPE?** Leonardo is the son of underground comic writer [**GREASER COMICS**] and distributor, George DiCaprio. His newest film is **THE BASKETBALL DIARIES**.

The latest hustle is Hollywood's first interactive movie, **MR. PAYBACK**. The idea of an interactive movie like that of interactive TV is pure hokum, since the choices are pre-programmed. Locally, **MR. PAYBACK** was shown in one of those shoebox mallplexes that hold 100 people. Each person had a remote allowing three choices. What happened onscreen was determined by a computer which averaged the choices. If 51 of the 100 decided to blow up the villain, he was blown up. Real interaction between a person and a computer happens everytime someone boots up, but to refer to **MR. PAYBACK** as an interactive movie is a fraud because the audience cannot choose the choices. I can't run a program that isn't installed on my computer. I can only select and use what is there. At the same time, there are an infinite number of ways I can use my programs to create what I want be it a letter, a picture, a game, or an animated sequence for a CD-ROM. Interactive TV includes several versions of an event and I can choose one of them, but I can't select my own version and reject the preconceptions of the creator. **MR. PAYBACK** is nothing but a collection of tired out adventure film clichés, more macho brainwash aimed at preadolescent boys.

## THE WILD GIRLS CLUB

Anka Radakovich, sex columnist for **DETAILS** mag, put together some of her funniest columns for **THE WILD GIRLS CLUB: TALES FROM BELOW THE BELT** [New York: Ballantine, May, 1995]. Anka who describes a condom as "an extra sock for the third leg," has done everything at least once, and most things a lot more often. The difference between her and many other women authors is her willingness to talk about her experiences in detail, and like some of the folks in the AVA, particularly on the letters pages, she expressed opinions about everything. "To women, the penis is a peculiar organ. We believe that man's best friend is actually his penis. Like a dog, it is always happy to see us, enjoys being petted, and often rubs itself against our legs. When we are not calling it "it" or "he," we are using pet names [8]]." Anka denies Freud's theory that women envy penises: "...we do not envy the penis. The reasons are obvious. First, we would not know how to sit comfortably with one; second, we do not want something veiny falling out of our shorts; and third, a penis looks terrible in a tight dress [11]." Anka did a survey of sexual attitudes in the 1990s and was surprised at a lot of the answers she received. She asked "What do you regret or resent about sexuality in the 90s?" only to find the general concensus was "people felt they missed out on the sexual revolution They felt cheated and angry that their parents used to get laid more than they do. Whereas the worst fear of our parents' generation was pregnancy, our generation's biggest worry is AIDS [31]." Anka was encouraged by the large number of people who expressed a desire for someone to love, but realized since nearly half of her respondants admitted to cheating on their girlfriends at least once "that men are still, in the end, led around by the head between their legs [32]." From some of the kinky answers to her survey, she concluded that "deep down, men would really love to be doing the wild thing way more than they are--and the kinkier, the better [33]."

Though routinely the tongue-in-cheek parodist, Anka engages in some of the how-to rap that made Helen Gurley Brown's **SEX AND THE SINGLE GIRL** a top seller three decades back. She includes a chapter on how to dump the boyfriend, noting "the breakup letter should be gentle, soothing, and always take the high road. It's a kind move to say something about how wonderful he was, how you'll miss being with him, and how lucky you feel to have known him. Leave out any mention of the fact that his excessive flatulence gave you headaches [39]." Men and women react differently to a break-up. "A woman's first move is to get together with her girlfriends. She pours out the story, elicits sympathy, and listens to them tell her what a loser he was for dumping her, reminding her that he was conceited about his looks and that his penis was too small anyway [39]." And the guys? Anka pictures them racing off to a strip bar "to seek comfort in the cleavage of writing women with names like Candy Cantaloupes [40]." C'mon, Anka, give guys credit for a little more sensitivity. Break-ups are always complex. If love has run its course, both parties may be relieved when one or the other calls the hand, but if one is still smitten while the other's passions have drifted elsewhere, weird things may happen. A friend of mine was still in mid-passion a few years back when the object of his love/lust decided to end it. He couldn't take it. Developed a response to her car that was almost fetishistic. Whenever he saw the car on the street, his heart pumped faster and he broke out into a sweat. He followed the car all over town, even though he knew everywhere she was likely to go. She wouldn't talk to him on the phone and if he caught up with her car she wouldn't roll down the window and listen to him. He was a basket case for months. And it was her he wanted, not Candy Cantaloupes or some stranger in a body bar.

Since I have known a number of people around the Bay Area who have tried to connect via the singles ads in the various entertainment papers, I enjoyed Anka's account of her trip through the ad world. She's right about everyone lying in their ads, but that stands to reason. Who is going to put in an ad that tells the truth? Entertainers certainly don't. Ever go to a club to see that dashing young blues singer on the poster only to find a man at least twenty years older with a beer belly and lots of wrinkles? Anka decribes one of her dates: "My third bachelor was Tom, a thirty-four-year old doctor who specialized in liver transplants and tissue research. I made the mistake of saying, 'Tissue research, how interesting!' and he launched into a monologue about isolating tissue cultures. After fifteen tedious minutes, I changed the subject to avoid slipping into a coma. To liven things up I asked, "When they do sex-change operations from male to female, do they really stuff the meat back up in there?' He was not amused [59]." A friend of mine who tried the ad scene for awhile learned that a lot of middle-aged men, many of them married, many of them rapists, used the ads as a way to get sex. While she was smart enough to meet first time dates in public places she chose, she was still date raped twice in a few months time.

The next illusion that was shattered for Anka was the singles cruise. After the LOVE BOAT years, most people probably thought everyone who took a cruise to Hawaii or the Caribbean Islands had pecs and buns of steel and a witty comment for every occasion, but 'twas never thus. Says Anka: "I fantasized about an adventure set aboard an elegant ocean liner of the 1930s, a Noel Coward scenario where the men were sophisticated, the women chic. Instead I discovered Middle America aboard a crowded fourteen-floor floating hotel/mall in Vegas. The decks were packed with honeymooners from Indiana and retirees in comfy leisurewear, as well as tour groups of insurance salesmen and Finalube (oil Lubricant) conventioneers from Texas [71]."

**THE WILD GIRLS CLUB** is a lot of fun. You'll enjoy Anka's piece on testing designer condoms. I'm still not used to walking into a drugstore and seeing an entire section filled with dozens of brands of an item I bought with a great deal of embarassment from a druggist's wife in my teen years. Anka is right when she says that embarassment has not disappeared. "Today women and men are buying condoms, sharing both the responsibility and the shopping experience. While some men were raised to believe that a condom in their wallet was a badge of playboyhood, women now slip them into their handbags as a matter of convenience and safety. Our only problem with shopping for condoms at the drugstore is the inevitable sudden appearance of four male salesclerks who emerge from the woodwork, eager to serve us. This makes us even more uncomfortable when we're standing in front of boxes with names like 'Climax,' 'Night Rider,' and 'Deep Stroker [84].'"

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While Japanese theater has a long tradition of single-sex casting, contemporary comic books aimed at Japanese girls have gone a step further to serialize romances between beautiful, sensitive gay men, who are called 'honorable pots' in slang. From this came an unflattering vogue word for girls who search for real-life versions of their comic-book darlings by attaching themselves to gay men. Japanese speculate that they are attracted by the safety of being with gays, or by a common interest in fashion, or simply because they can't catch a boyfriend. Their close association with 'pots' brands them as okoge, a term usually applied to burned rice stuck to the bottom of a pot.

Kittridge Cherry.
**WOMANWORDS.**
New York: Kodansha, p. 35.

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June 2, 1995. Big Moon-in at Stanford today, an attempt to make the Guinness book. Lots of bare buns on display briefly. Some imitations of Beavis and Butthead, patron saints of mooning.

Finally saw an episode of **TEKWAR**. It's a lowbrow show with a high tech overlay. I watched a woman beaten and stranged with a Virtual Reality rationale. Didn't work for me. No cigar, Shatner.

Am I the only one who thought **PULP FICTION** was a pile of unregenerate racist horseshit slid into the public psyche under a parody cover? Looks like it. I finally watched its precursor, **NATURAL BORN KILLERS**, in which a couple of really nasty rotten assholes boogie around killing just about anyone and everyone then go off in an RV to live happily ever after. Do these films, which glorify scumbags, represent THE FUTURE? Is this the bloody face of things to come? Which is worse, reality or the tv movie version? On April 19, the OJ trial, which has turned into one of history's longest yawns, was blown off the little screen by a midwestern bomber seeking revenge against the government for the slaughter of the Branch Davidians. Before you can say *Juice! Juice!* there'll be a tv movie about the bomber and the bombing using actual footage of the Federal building in Oklahoma City. A year or so ago, I saw a tv movie starring James Garner in his old Rockford role; that film included actual footage of the Malibu hills fire and the street action after the Rodney King verdict and ended with a simulated earthquake. More and more reality appears in tv films as fantasy fails to measure up.